



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS

"To Enrich Lives Through Effective and Caring Service"

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Pastor Herrera, Jr.
Director
County of Los Angeles
Department of Consumer Affairs

PRESS ADVISORY *For Immediate Release* **Wednesday, October 29, 2008**

Wendy L. Watanabe
Acting Auditor-Controller
County of Los Angeles
Auditor-Controller's Office

CONTACT: PASTOR HERRERA, JR., DIRECTOR, 213-974-9750

THIEVES USE FAKE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES-LOOK-ALIKE CHECKS TO SCAM VICTIMS OUT OF THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS

As fake check scams proliferate and get more sophisticated in nature, more and more unsuspecting consumers are losing thousands of dollars to this financially harmful scam.

A current scam targeting seniors across Southern California uses fake checks that appear to be from the County of Los Angeles to lure victims into wiring money to thieves in Canada.

One vigilant consumer asked the Los Angeles County Department of the Auditor-Controller to verify the legitimacy of a County check he received. Auditor-Controller staff determined that the check was counterfeit. Further investigation discovered the existence of an elaborate fake check scam.

Here is how the scam works. The victim, usually a senior citizen, receives an official-looking "final notice" claiming to be from "Canada Customs and Revenue Agency." The notice tells the victim that he won a lottery prize, and urges him to call immediately to claim his winnings. When the victim calls, the "official" tells him that he has to pay a customs fee. To reassure the victim, the thief offers to mail him a check, and asks him to deposit the check in his bank account and wire the funds back to claim his prize.

The victim then receives a check that looks like it was issued by the County of Los Angeles. Convinced this is the real thing, the victim deposits the check and wires the money via MoneyGram to British Columbia, Canada. Days later, the victim's bank tells him that the check bounced and he needs to pay the money. The victim, of course, never gets the prize.

Los Angeles County officials say that fake check scams are on the rise. "Recent surveys show that fake check scams rank on the top five consumer scams," said Pastor Herrera, Jr., Director of the County of Los Angeles Department of Consumer Affairs. "Consumers must protect themselves against these scams because once they wire money to thieves it is virtually impossible to get it back."

Herrera offers these tips for consumers to spot and avoid fake check scams:

- **Never wire money to strangers.** There is no reason for someone to pay you by check and ask you to wire back some of the money
- **Fake checks look real.** Even some bank tellers are fooled by some fake checks. However, just because the bank accepts the fake check and releases the funds, it doesn't mean the check is good. It can take weeks for the bank to find out and tell you that the check is bad.
- **You are responsible for fake checks you deposit.** When a fake check bounces, the bank will deduct money from your account or even sue you to recover the funds. If you deposit a check you know is fake, you can be prosecuted.
- **It is very hard to get your money back.** Thieves often live in other countries out of the reach of U.S. authorities. Your best protection is not to send them money no matter what they promise you.
- **If it sounds too good to be true, it is.** Don't believe promises that you won a lottery or drawing you never entered.

Victims and people who need information on fake check scams can call the Department of Consumer Affairs at **800-593-8222**, 500 W. Temple St., Room B-6, Los Angeles, CA 90012, Website: **dca.lacounty.gov**.

URGENT CLAIM NOTICE

Package Recovery
3111 Airport Way
Vancouver , BC V5P 1B2



RECEIVED

OCT 21 2008

Yolo County District Attorney

WOODLAND CA 95776

Claim Number: 6394

Package Recovery been holding a parcel addressed to you containing \$88,000 in US currency. This parcel has been stopped at The Vancouver International Airport due to unpaid taxes

The sender of the package is unknown because the top part of the shipping label was ripped off the package. Since the package cannot be returned it must be delivered to you.

Since US Congress has made it unlawful to charge a US Citizen with collection fees you will be issued a government check so you can pay your taxes.

Please call James Church to have a government sponsor mail you a check you can use to pay the taxes required to release your \$88,000 from Canada.

Call James Church 1(778) 318-1345

Leave message with your Claim Number (follow red line), Your name and Telephone

I will call you back between 10am and 2pm California time.

Due to increasing fraudulent claims in the United States we remind you that this is a legal transaction and there is no cost to you, all fees will be paid for you.

Sincerely,

James Church
Package Recovery Division



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
AUDITOR CONTROLLER'S GENERAL WARRANT
WARRANT CLEARANCE FUND LOS ANGELES CALIFORNIA

W 0008385683

THE TREASURER OF THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
500 W TEMPLE ST ROOM 502 LOS ANGELES, CA 90012

OCTOBER 15, 2008

NOT PAYABLE AFTER SIX
MONTHS FROM DATE OF ISSUED

PAYABLE THROUGH BANK OF AMERICA
LOS ANGELES CALIFORNIA

PAY TO THE ORDER OF:

MISC AAP

LOUIS FRANKLIN
PO BOX 1521
WOODLAND

CA 95776

013

Amount
\$ ****3,130.00

16-66
1220

APPROVED
R NLER MUGABE, AUDITOR CONTROLLER

BY

PAY: THREE THOUSAND ONE HUNDRED THIRTY 00/100 DOLLARS

⑈0008385683⑈ ⑆ 122000661⑆ 14595⑈ 21400⑈

ABSENCE OF PINK U.S. PATENT NUMBERS UNDER SIGNATURE INDICATES CHECK IS FRAUDULENT. PATENT NUMBERS ARE PRINTED WITH SENSITIVE INK & WILL DISAPPEAR WHEN BLOWING OR RUBBING